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AUTHOR Neher, William W.
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ABSTRACT

Comparative rhetoric studies the mode of public address among a specified group of people and the theories and values governing their public address in specific cultural contexts. Two ways to consider the subject of values in comparative rhetoric involve values as norms and values as appeals. Values assumed to be held by the audience are the bases for persuasion and may be studied as possible appeals in public address. During Kenya's parliamentary election of 1969 the appeals of political speakers were classified into four categories: personal qualifications, audience values or dis-values, speakers' past accomplishments, and promised future accomplishments. These appeals indicate the ambivalence that was felt in this country between traditional value systems and modern or national value systems: the wisdom of age and the youth of modern education; women's rights challenging a traditional value system; new goals of independence and nation building conjoined with pragmatic appeals for sharing the wealth. The specific content and use of value strategies depend upon the national and historical context. Therefore, to study comparative rhetoric requires in-depth preparation and access to field data, if not field work itself. (HOD)

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COMPARATIVE RHETORIC: APPLICATIONS IN AFRICAN STUDIES

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William W. Neher
Butler University

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COMPARATIVE RHETORIC AND AFRICAN STUDIES

Theoretical Background

Public address is one of the most important means of mobilizing populations in Africa, as well as other areas where the press and electronic media are in early stages of development, and where people expect leaders to validate personally innovations. Concerning national development, one economist writes: "Thus it is crucial that the party [in Tanzania] make available . . . men who can travel around making speeches and bringing people into contact with established goals."[1] Nkrumah of Ghana and other African leaders have stressed the need and importance of rhetorical efforts for "stirring" the people for economic development.[2] Since there have been few studies of public address or rhetoric within these nations from the point of view of speech communication scholarship, this paper is intended to suggest possible frameworks for such research. In defining comparative rhetoric, I will analyze first the meaning of the adjective, comparative, and secondly, how rhetoric can be defined for comparative studies.

"Culture consists of patterns . . .", say Kroeber and Kluckhohn in their critical review of various conceptualizations of the term, "culture,"[3] It is assumed that these patterns are distinctive for different human groups or communities.

A culture, therefore, is a theoretical construct intended to represent the distinctive life style, value system, or customary modes of behavior for members of a specified human group. The existence of persisting and distinctive cultural patterns permits one to attempt comparisons among cultures. It is assumed, for the purposes of such comparative or contrastive analysis, that different communities, developing in some isolation from one another, develop different manners of structuring their perceptions of the world and their behavioral responses to those perceptions. Patterns of interpersonal communication are assumed to be distinctive for cultures. Observing and classifying such patterns is seen here as the beginning point for comparative rhetoric.

Rhetoric is defined as (1) the mode of public address among a specified group of people, and (2) the theories and values governing public address for that defined group. The two aspects of the definition are obviously interrelated since the mode of public address should reflect the theories and values governing it in a given society. The behaviors and settings that constitute the pattern of public speaking, that is, the mode of public address, are more readily observable than the underlying pattern of principles and values, which may be inferred from such observations. The objects of comparative rhetoric, in other words, are "national rhetorics," or "cultural rhetorics," terms which have been suggested in the literature of speech communication by Professors Ellingsworth

and Oliver.[4] It may be well to draw a distinction between the study of cross-cultural communication and the cross-cultural study of communication, as described here. The study of "national" or "cultural" rhetorics concerns communications that are internally directed, that is, within the same cultural boundaries. Admittedly, the new nations of Africa are extremely pluralistic societies, encompassing several communities distinguishable along cultural, ethnic, or linguistic lines. The research must be explicit, therefore, about communications that may raise issues of inter-ethnic conflict (such as charges about "tribalism"). One also notes that the African inhabitants of an African nation may be expected to share a large body of cultural similarities, especially if compared to non-African nations.

Values, Language, and Media--The Variables

The scholar of rhetoric or communication theory is concerned with the significant variables that influence rhetorical discourse in a given context. There seem to be three broad areas of potential variables for study in the African setting: values, language, and media. I will return to value systems in a moment. Language choices are important rhetorical variables in multi-lingual states, characteristic of sub-Saharan Africa. I am referring to sociolinguistic issues such as those discussed by writers in Language Problems

of Developing Nations, edited by Fishman, Ferguson, and Das Gupta.[5] Media refers to channels ofcommunication or methods selected for transmitting the message. The medium chosen can in part determine the effect of the communication. Radio, for example, is a politically more effective medium in Africa than newspapers. (One can be directed to Doob's famous study, Communication in Africa).[6] In the brief time allotted for this section of the program, I will consider only the first area of potential variables, values.

There are two ways that one may consider the subject of values or value systems in comparative rhetoric: values as norms and values as appeals. Norms refer to the the expectations that audiences and speakers have concerning the prescribed manner, time, and setting for public address. Values assumed to be held by the audience are typically the bases for persuasion, and it is in this second sense that values may be studied as possible appeals in public address.

I will now briefly summarize a few field observations from East Africa concerning the function of value appeals in political campaign speaking. These observations are some results of a research project made possible by a grant from the Council for Intersocietal Studies, Northwestern University, in Kenya (terms of the grant, 1969-70 school year). The political campaign studied was the parliamentary election of 1969, Kenya's first such general election since independence in 1963. There is not time to go into the background of this election--it was

during a critical period in Kenyan history.

For purposes of the study, an appeal was defined as any argument advanced by a speaker for his own election to the National Assembly. Information about appeals so defined was gathered for 292 speeches given by 182 candidates. These appeals, set down as short statements or summaries, can be classified in four descriptive categories of persuasive strategy based on value systems of audiences. These categories are the result of my own efforts to organize the material for presentation:

1. Appeals based on personal qualifications;
2. Appeals based on association with audience values or rejection of audience dis-values;
3. Appeals based on speaker's past accomplishments;
4. Appeals based on promised future accomplishments.

Appeals based on personal qualifications included reference to the speaker's innate characteristics, such as age, sex, ancestry, or home region. References to age indicated an ambivalence toward age in a society undergoing social and cultural change. Traditionally, elders are respected, but youth is associated with education and modernizing sophistication. One elder politician referred to his opponents as <u>vijana vibichi</u> (green or unripe youths), while his opponents claimed that he was out of touch with the modern world. It was possible to say of one candidate that he was too old, and of another that he was too young. (More candidates were in the thirties than any other age group). The issue of sex was relevant in only a few

constituencies, but interestingly it was raised in terms of women's rights. The women candidates said that they should be elected to prove that women had equal rights in the new Kenya. Concerning ancestry, one candidate referred to her descent from a famous Kikuyu leader as proof that she had political leadership in her blood. Candidates also warned against "outsiders" in appealing for votes on the basis of their home area. Speaker-candidates also reflected audience values concerning modernizing education and occupations in pointing to personal qualifications in those areas.

In appeals of the second type, candidates sought votes by associating themselves with entities assumed to be valued by the audiences, especially the nationalist movement and nationalist symbols and leaders. Some candidates claimed to have been "freedom fighters" during the so-called "Mau Mau" insurgency against the British. Others reminded their audiences that they had been placed in detention by the British. Some speakers attempted to associate themselves with President Kenyatta, the Father of the Nation. Certainly, Kenyatta remains one of the most powerful legitimating symbols in Kenya today. Speakers also associated themselves with audiences' value systems by rejecting those things they believed the audience did or should reject, such as "tribalism," corruption, buying votes with money or beer, extravagant promises, and "night activities," referring to political thuggery.

Past accomplishments and campaign promises can be lumped together in the interests of time. These appeals were usually concerned with pragmatic, concrete services for local people in the consituency. The candidate would refer to donations or aid given to people while the candidate was a private citizen or public official. They referred to scholarships for local students, money or material for local schools, dispensaries, or roads. One candidate, for example, claimed that he had helped 601 students to obtain scholarships for higher education. Another nationally prominent politician was even accused of corruption when it was pointed out that the money he claimed to have dispensed was far more than his total salary. The traditional, communal principle of sharing the wealth with ethnic kinsmen seems to be operative in the modern political system.

In summary, the value appeals in the political campaign indicate the ambivalence felt in developing nations between traditional value systems, on the one hand, and modern or national value systems, on the other: the wisdom of age and the youth of modern education; women's rights challenging a traditional value system; new goals of independence and nation building conjoined with pragmatic appeals for sharing the wealth. The specific content and use of value strategies depend upon the national and historical context. Therefore, to study comparative rhetoric in this way requires in-depth preparation and access to field data, if not field work itself.

This paper has attempted to clarify the notion of comparative rhetoric. Rhetoric was defined in terms that pointed to the kinds of behavior to observed, described and classified. The method of classification should depend upon specific cultural contexts. Three broad areas of variables for rhetorical study have been indicated: values, language, and media. Very briefly, one study of values used in rhetorical discourse was presented.

NOTES

[1] Henry Bienen, Tanzania, Party Transformation and Economic Development, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 334.

[2] Kwame Nkrumah, "Some Aspects of Socialism in Kenya," William H. Friedland and Carl G. Rosberg, eds., African Socialism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 263.

[3] A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 357.

[4] See Huber W. Ellingsworth, "Anthropology and Rhetoric: Toward a Culture-Related Methodology of Speech Criticism," Southern Speech Journal, 28 (1963), 307-312; Huber W. Ellingsworth, "National Rhetorics and Inter-cultural Communication," Today's Speech, 17, 1 (1969), 35-38; Robert T. Oliver, "Culture and Communication: A Major Challenge in International Relations," Vital Speeches, XXIX (Spetember 15, 1963), 721-24.

[5] Joshua A. Fishman, Charles A. Ferguson, Jyotirindra Das Gupta, Eds., Language Problems of Developing Nations (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968).

[6] Leonard W. Doob, Communication in Africa: A Search for Boundaries (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1966).